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FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EG](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY DOWNPLAYS SIGNIFICANCE  
OF IRANIAN VISIT

Classified by Minister Counselor for Economic and Political  
Affairs William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Egyptian government-owned press reported on September 18 that Iranian Assistant Foreign Minister Abbas Iraq was holding talks with Egyptian Foreign Ministry officials. Iraq was to meeting MFA Assistant Minister for Asian Affairs Hussein Darar and Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs Naela Gabr, according to the reports, and would discuss both bilateral relations and regional issues. Egyptian government-owned daily Al Gomhuria noted that Iranian President Ahmadinejad previously had announced that a meeting between Egyptian and Iranian foreign ministers would follow a meeting of this kind.

¶2. (C) MFA Spokesman and Chief of the Foreign Minister's Cabinet, Ambassador Hossam Zaki, told ECPO MinCouns that the press reports were "inaccurate." We are not restoring diplomatic relations, he said, because they have never been broken. The issue has always been about the level of those relations. We have long talked to the Iranians about how we might be able to make progress in improving our bilateral relations. They know that we have certain security concerns (NFI) and symbolic issues, "such as re-naming that street in Tehran."

¶3. (C) Zaki said confirmed that Iraq had met with various officials at the MFA, including the FM's cabinet. In response to MinCouns query, Zaki said that FM Aboul Gheit had "stuck his head in the room" during the Iranian delegation's visit with the cabinet staff. "He stayed five minutes, said what he wanted to say, and then left, that's all." MinCouns asked if there were any truth to reports that there would be ministerial meetings in the future. Zaki said that while any such talk was speculative, it was nonetheless "out there for discussion." It all depends on whether or not we make any progress in our discussions with the Iranians, he said. "They know what we want; whether they are willing to give us is another question." Also, he added, "you never know who you might run into at the UN."  
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